

Connecticut After School Network

Testimony to the Appropriations Committee In Support of Funding for After School Programs

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Good evening, Senator Harp, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Michelle Doucette Cunningham, and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut After School Network, a statewide alliance representing the thousands of children, parents and staff who participate in after school and summer programs all across the state.

I am here this evening, on behalf of the more than 5,000 children and their families that benefit from the state-funded After School Grant Program in the State Department of Education budget, to urge you to re-instate the \$4.5 million for this program, which was entirely eliminated in the Governor's proposal. This funding is essential and without it thousands of children and families will be without the after school programs they depend upon.

After school programs supported by this grant help working families, keep children safe, and improve student learning. Research shows that the program works -- the Results-Based Accountability (RBA) scorecard prepared by the Department each year shows that they are reaching their targeted participants and making a difference in the lives of young people. Evaluation results of these grant-funded programs by the University of Connecticut demonstrate that program participants show significant CMT test score improvements in math and reading. The state-funded After School Grant Program would be a worthwhile investment of our tax dollars and deserves substantially more funding, not less.

The After School Grant program is making a significant difference in changing the ways communities and schools work together. President Obama said "The time has come for America to rethink how, where, and when our young people learn." This was echoed by the Connecticut Association of School Superintendents' *NextEd* Report last year when it recommended that Connecticut "redefine the use of time in order to support a personalized learning system; make achievement the constant and time the variable. Allow students to learn anytime, anywhere."

After school programs are also one of the best tools in the state's arsenal for combatting the persistent achievement gap between high-income and low-income students. A forthcoming national study that clearly shows that income differences in math achievement were eliminated for students who had consistent after-school activities across grades K-5.

After School Program Facts:

- The After School Grant Program serves more than **5,000 kids** grades K-12 at 61 sites in **27 cities and towns** across Connecticut, from small rural communities to the state's largest cities.
- The average program serves **120 students**, many serving more than one site in their community, at a cost to the state of less than **\$1,000 per student** or about \$10 per day.

- The **average grant was \$120,000** per year and leverages significant additional local funding and in-kind support.
- After School programs funded by these grants **employ approximately 500 staff** in total, as well as providing thousands of working families with necessary child care. About 90% of the funding is spent on direct program expenses.
- More than twice as many grant applications were submitted for this program than could be funded, showing that the need for this type of funding is great.
- This is a competitive grant program for which any nonprofit, school or municipality can apply.

In 2010, seven out of ten Connecticut children ages 6–12 had all available parents in the labor force. Yet because the school day does not match up with the work day, and because there are not enough programs to serve all those who need them, too many children are home alone or under-supervised while their parents are at work. Not only is this unsafe, it's also unproductive.

We know that today's young people in every part of Connecticut need to know more and be able to do more if they are to succeed in a highly-technical and international workforce. The hours after school and during the summer present a great opportunity to better prepare students academically, socially and civically.

The next decade holds both great promise and enormous challenge in terms of education reform and the role of afterschool. We believe that Connecticut is up to this challenge. As state and local leaders we need to keep our focus on outcomes for children and youth, and support those programs that are making a significant difference. The research evidence is clear that afterschool and summer programs, especially those that involve collaborations between schools and community-based organizations, provide the return on investment that justify significantly expanding these programs. Not only are student outcomes better on a large variety of measures, but working families and their employers are supported and communities are safer as well. We must encourage local communities to look closely at the needs of young people in their community, and help us to implement after school programs that can deliver on this promise.

After school programs supported by this grant keep young people safe, help working families, and help students succeed in school and in life. The benefits are clear and well-documented — please keep the state-funded After School Grant Program fully funded so that it can continue to deliver for Connecticut's children and families.

Thank you for allowing me to speak with you this evening.